

PUTREṢṬI IN THE RĀMĀYAṆA: WAS IT REALLY NECESSARY

In Sarga 8 of the *Bāla kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Daśaratha is mentioned as having deliberations with his ministers for performing a Vājimedha sacrifice for obtaining a son¹. He asks Sumantra, his Chief Minister, to invite the priests. Sumantra (the Sūta) has heard from the priests the episode of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga relevant to Daśaratha's obtainment of sons as narrated in the presence of the Ṛṣis of old by Sanatkumāra. The episode runs as follows: Kaśyapa's son Vibhāṇḍaka will have a son Ṛṣyaśṛṅga who would recognize no other person than his father, because of his exclusive devotion to him. At that time there will be severe drought in Aṅgadeśa. Its King Romapāda, on the advice of the Brāhmaṇas, will request them to bring Ṛṣyaśṛṅga into his kingdom. The Purohita, etc. fearing the curse of the sage Vibhāṇḍaka, will bring Ṛṣyaśṛṅga with the help of courtesans whereupon it will rain in his kingdom and the king will give in marriage his daughter Śāntā to him. Sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, will perform the sacrifice for Daśaratha for obtaining sons². Here ends a part of the story of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga as reproduced by Sumantra.

On Daśaratha's query as to how the courtesans managed to bring Ṛṣyaśṛṅga Sumantra says that they could do so by alluring him towards them in a number of ways. They offered him Modakas and other tasty sweets which he took for fruit, he not having tasted them earlier and invited him to their Āśrama. He responded to their invitation and left along with them. In Sarga 10 he says that it is already foreseen by Sanatkumāra that Daśaratha would approach Romapāda and request him to persuade his son-in-law Ṛṣyaśṛṅga to perform the sacrifice for him (Daśaratha). Accordingly Daśaratha having convinced Vasiṣṭha³, approaches Romapāda and brings Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, Śāntā's husband to his capital. In the spring season he starts preparations for the sacrifice by

1. BK. 8.2-3.

2. BK. 8.5-22.

3. See BK. 10.13: *anumānya Vasiṣṭham ca*.

releasing the sacrificial horse⁴ and at the advent of the next spring season the sacrifice proper begins⁵. The *Sarga* 13 describes the details of the sacrifice. After Vājimedha or Aśvamedha is duly performed Ṛṣyaśṛṅga performs the Putrīyā Iṣṭi at the request of Daśaratha with the « *Ātharvaṇa mantras* »⁶ as a result of which four sons are born of the three queens of Dasaratha⁷.

It may here be pointed out that it has been made clear in the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself that the purpose of Daśaratha's performing the Aśvamedha sacrifice is to beget sons. At more than one place he expressly says this⁸. Even the priests promise him that by performing Aśvamedha, he will obtain four sons⁹.

A contradiction in the narrative appears when Daśaratha is shown to obtain sons, not through Aśvamedha but through the Putrīyā Iṣṭi. Naturally the question would arise: When Aśvamedha was enough for obtaining sons, why should a second sacrifice, Putrīyā Iṣṭi be needed? The commentators have also felt this contradiction and have tried to offer some sort of explanation. Govindarāja, for instance, says that the Aśvamedha was performed to purge Daśaratha of all the sins after which the latter could perform the Putreṣṭi. He quotes a Vedic text to the effect that one who performs Aśvamedha clears himself even of the sin of Brahmicide¹⁰. Rāma, the author of the *Tilaka* commentary goes a step further and says that the Aśvamedha was intended to expiate Daśaratha's sin of Brahmicide which he had incurred in the prime of his

4. BK. 11.8, 11, 14, 19.

5. BK. 12, 13.

6. BK. 14.2-3.

7. BK. 15.8 ff.

8. Cf. BK. 8.2: *Sutārthaṁ vājimedhena kimārthaṁ na yajāmy aham /* BK. 11.2-3: *... taṁ vipram...*

yajñāya varayāmāsa santānārthaṁ kulasya ca //
tatheti ca sa rājānam uvāca ca susatkṛtaḥ //
sambhārāḥ sambhriyantāṁ te turagaś ca vimucyatām //
BK. 11.8:

mama lālapyamānasya putrārthaṁ nāsti vai sukham //
tadarthaṁ hayamedhena yakṣyāmīti matir mama //

9. Cf. BK. 11.11-12:

sambhārāḥ sambhriyantāṁ te turagaś ca vimucyatām //
sarvathā prāpsyase putrān caturo' mitavikramān //

10. See his commentary on the beginning of BK. 12:

evaṁ Daśarathaḥ sarvakāmasamyddho'pi putrālābhasantaptas tanmūlāni pā-
pāni svādhikārānurūpeṇāśvamedhena vinā na vinaśyanti manvānaḥ 'sarva
pāpmānaḥ tarati tarati brahmahatyām yo' śvamedhena yajata' iti śrutyā
'rājā sārvaḥ saumo'śvamedhena yajeta' iti smṛtyā ca vihitaṁ aśvamedhaṁ
yaṣṭuṁ saṁkalpya... etc. Again towards the end of that Sarga.

youth by killing by mistake the young sage Śravaṇa¹¹. He puts up the situation thus: If Daśaratha wanted sons for which Putreṣṭi was enough, why should he perform the Aśvamedha at all? This he did, for he had incurred the sin of Brachmicide by killing Śravaṇa. He had to expiate it before he could perform Putreṣṭi. For this purpose Aśvamedha was necessary.

Now Rāma's attempt to provide motivation for Aśvamedha by referring to the Śravaṇa episode is occasioned by a desire to explain away the duplication of sacrifices. But then there is enough motivation for the Śravaṇa episode in the place in which it occurs. In the *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa*, just before his death, Daśaratha remembers¹² that in his youth, he had killed a young sage mistaking him for some animal, and his bereaved parents had cursed him that he too would meet a similar death in separation from his children. Thus Daśaratha's agonizing death in separation from his sons is adequately motivated by this episode for which no further justification, as sought by *Tilaka*, is necessary. On the contrary, if we accept Rāma's explanation, some further contradictions creep in.

1. In the critical text of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as well as in the Vulgate, the name of the hunted young sage does not find mention anywhere in the episode. How could Rāma have then got it?

2. Again, the young sage himself tells the king that he could have no fear of having killed a Brahmin since he is a Vaiśya's son born of a Śūdrā¹³. How could Rāma have taken his killing as Brahmicide to expiate which Daśaratha had to perform the Aśvamedha¹⁴?

3. Further, as the narrative goes, when he hunted and killed the young ascetic, Daśaratha was only a young man and had not even married Kausalya¹⁵. Now, if he was cursed to die in separation from his children, he must at least have them before he could be separated from them. In that case the curse would be a boon in disguise to circumscribe the period of childlessness of Daśaratha who then should not have had the necessity of resorting either to Aśvamedha or to Putreṣṭi for having sons.

11. *yady api putrakāmeṣṭyaiva putrāvāptiḥ sambhavati, tathāpi taporatasya Vaiśyasya Śravaṇasya vadhe tadviyogāturataporatatannmātāpitṛmarane ca brahmavadhasamapāpotpattyā tatprāyaścittennāśvamedhānuṣṭhānam bodhyam.* *Tilaka* on BK. 14.60 Nirṇaya Sagar Press, Bombay.

12. Ayk. 57-58.

13. vide Ayk. 57.37:

*na dvijātir ahaṁ rājan mā bhūt te manaso vyathā /
Śūdrāyaṁ asmi Vaiśyena jāto janapadādhipa //*

14. See f.n. No. 3 on p. 3.

15. Ayk. 57.10:

*devy anūṣṭhā tvam abhavo
yuvārājo bhavāmy aham.*

4. Aesthetically also, Rāma's attempt to explain away the duplicate sacrifice performed with the same motivation anticipated the so-called Śravaṇa episode long before it actually occurs in the course of the epic.

5. Finally it is better to take Daśaratha's obtainment of the four sons as a result of Aśvamedha rather than of Putreṣṭi since all the three queens who are said to have obtained sons are mentioned by their personal as well as sacerdotal names only in connection with Aśvamedha¹⁶. The Putreṣṭi just finds a mention in the Epic without any details.

The cumulative effect of all the above considerations is that if at all, the Aśvamedha should be considered responsible for Daśaratha's obtaining sons Putreṣṭi is purely duplicate and useless and therefore very likely an interpolation in the tale. Consequently the character of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga also which is specially brought in for performing that rite becomes redundant and appears grafted upon the narrative. This should naturally mean that the entire episode of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga is a late addition even to the *Bāla kāṇḍa* which by consensus is itself a later addition to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

A question that would naturally pose itself here is: why was its grafting necessary. A clue to this is furnished in the text where it is said that Ṛṣyaśṛṅga performed the Putreṣṭi with the Ātharvaṇa mantras. Now Ṛṣyaśṛṅga performed the Putreṣṭi, this statement itself would have sufficed. Why special mention of the Ātharvaṇa mantras. Our surmise is that the redactor who grafted the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga narrative was an Atharvavedin and to show the equal importance of his Veda along with the *Rgveda* that he concocted the narrative and grafted it on that of the Aśvamedha one. This fact also peeps out from the statement that Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was invited with the consent of Vasiṣṭha *anumānya Vasiṣṭham ca*. Again, the sages who approve of Daśaratha's desire to perform Aśvamedha are mentioned, as it were, in two groups, one headed by Vasiṣṭha and the other by Ṛṣyaśṛṅga¹⁷. Actually whenever Vasiṣṭha is mentioned the name of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga also occurs almost without fail¹⁸. Further, the attempt to show Ṛṣyaśṛṅga as predestined for the purpose of Daśaratha's begetting sons is only too crude to introduce an Ātharvaṇa Ṛṣi into the narrative to show the importance and the efficacy of the Veda, the *Atharva Veda*, to which the redactor might have belonged.

16. BK. 13.28:

*hotā'dhavyas tathodgātā hayena samayojayan /
mahīṣyā parivṛtyā' tha vāvātām aparām tathā //*

17. Cf. BK. 11.10c: *Vasiṣṭhapramukhāḥ sarve*
and 11.11a: *Ṛṣyaśṛṅgapurogās ca*.

18. Cf. BK. 11.10-11, 12.33, 12, 34, 13.2, 13.42.